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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 11629

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MASS, EAID, ETRD, TH,

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS EXPRESS RESENTMENT ABOUT

THAI/US RELATIONSHIP

SUMMARY: FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS MANIFESTED UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE STABILITY AND SECURITY OF ASIA, AND DEEP SEATED RESENTMENT TOWARD THE US, IN A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION WITH PROFESSOR FRANK TRAGER AT WHICH EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICERS WERE PRESENT. PRACHA KHUNAKASEM, DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR INFORMATION, AND A LONG TIME PERSONAL FRIEND OF DR. TRAGER, CONFIDENTIAL

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LED THE ATTACK, SUPPORTED CLOSELY BY THAI AMBASSADOR TO WASHING-

TON ANAN PANYARACHUN. THIS MESSAGE CONTAINS CLEAR EVIDENCES OF CHANGING THAI ATTITUDES WHICH WE HOPE WASHINGTON WILL NOTE AND BEAR IN MIND, SINCE THEY COULD HAVE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE U.S. POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES IN THIS AREA. IF THE SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED TO DR. TRAGER GROW AND TAKE ROOT, THE RTG SUSPENSION OF THE P-3 SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS MAY BE JUST THE BEGINNING OF A LONG SERIES OF RTG CURTAILMENTS OF US ACTIVITIES IN ORDER TO RIGHT THE PERCEIVED IMBALANCE BETWEEN WHAT THAILAND IS OFFERING US AND WHAT IT IS RECEIVING IN RETURN. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JULY 15, DR. FRANK TRAGER, NYU PROFESSOR ON SOUTHEAST ASIA AND LONG-TIME FRIEND OF AMBASSADOR KINTNER, MET INFORMALLY WITH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS. AMONG THE THAI PRESENT WAS DR. PRACHA KHUNAKASEM, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, AND ALSO A LONG-TIME FRIEND OF PROFESSOR TRAGER; AMBASSADOR ANAN (LIKEWISE A FRIEND OF MANY YEARS); ASA SARASIN, DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND PLANNING; MEMBERS OF THE POLICY AND PLANNING STAFF; AND A KEY DIVISION CHIEF. PRACHA, WHO TOOK THE LEAD IN THE DISCUSSION, IS WESTERN EDUCATED AND HAS A STRONG EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO THE UNITED STATES. YET REMARKS AT THIS MEETING REVEAL A GROWING FEELING OF RESENTMENT TOWARD AMERICA AMONG MAY RESPONSIBLE YOUNGER THOUGH INFLUENTIAL THAI OFFICIALS.

2. THE TWO AND ONE HALF HOUR SESSION BEGAN WITH A PRESENTATION OF VIEWS BY PROFESSOR TRAGER ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS REGION AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY. WE WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO SUMMARIZE OR RECORD TRAGER'S EXCELLENT COMMENTS BUT FOCUS ON THAI ATTITUDES AND STATEMENTS. PRACHA AND HIS COLLEAGUES BITTERLY ASSAILED THE U.S., ACCUSING IT OF HAVING ERODED THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND OF BEING AN UNRELIABLE ALLY TO THAILAND DURING THIS PERIOD OF INCREASING UNCERTAINTY AND PERHAPS DANGER. SPECIFICALLY THEY WERE CONCERNED ABOUT THE UNABATED HOSTILITY OF HANOI, THE APPARENT ASCENDANCY OF THE PATHET LAO FACTIONS IN LAOS, AND THE DISTURBING CONFLICT SITUATION IN CAMBODIA.

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3. PRACHA SAID THAT PRESIDENT NIXON'S TRIP TO PEKING HAD BEGUN AN EROSION OF THE PREVIOUS STATUS QUO WHICH AFFECTED NEARLY ALL THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. IN ADDITION, AMERICA'S VIETNAM TRAUMA HAD CREATED A PALPABLE DISINCLINATION, ESPECIALLY IN CONGRESS, TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH ASIA. HE SAID AMERICA NEVER SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN INVOLVED IN VIETNAM IF IT DID NOT PLAN TO WIN SINCE HALF MEASURES WERE WORSE THAN NONE. THE SEATO

ALLIANCE NOW APPEARS INCREASINGLY ANACHRONISTIC IN LIGHT OF US INABILITY--OR LACK OF WILL--TO HONOR ITS COMMITMENTS. THUS THE US STANDS ACCUSED OF BOTH INDUCING THE NEWLY UNCERTAIN SITUATION AND FAILING TO DO ITS PART TO HELP ASIAN COUNTRIES MEET THE CHALLENGES THE NEW SITUATION PRESENTS.

4. PRACHA ACCUSED US OF FAILING TO DO WHAT THAILAND BELIEVED HE HAD COMMITTED OURSELVES TO DO IN THE 1960S. IN PARTICULAR, HE SAID US MILITARY ASSISTANCE HAD FAILED TO CREATE A SELF-RELIANT THAI MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT BUT HAD INSTEAD SADDLED THAILAND WITH A HIGHLY MECHANIZED AND SOPHISTICATED ARSENAL, TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON CONTINUED US SUPPLIES AND SPARE PARTS, AND ONE BEYOND THAILAND'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT BY ITSELF. PRACHA AND OTHERS IN THE ROOM EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION THAT THAILAND HAD UNRESERVEDLY CAST ITS LOT WITH AMERICA FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS, AND WAS NOW FACING GREATER THREATS TO ITS NATIONAL SECURITY WITH A LESSENER CAPABILITY TO DEFEND ITSELF. PRACHA SAID THAT THAILAND USED TO HAVE AN INDIGENOUS ARMAMENT INDUSTRY BUT THAT US MILITARY AID HAD ALMOST PUT IT OUT OF BUSINESS. (TRAGER ANSWERED THAT HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT THE US WOULD HAVE DENIED THAILAND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SELF-SUFFICIENT MILITARY MACHINE IF THAT WERE WHAT THAILAND HAD ASKED FOR CONSISTENTLY DURING THE PAST 20 YEARS.

5. BOTH PRACHA AND ANAN QUESTIONED SHARPLY WHAT THAILAND WAS ACHIEVING THROUGH ITS ALLIANCE WITH THE U.S. BESIDES AN INCREASED THREAT TO ITS INDEPENDENCE AND A LESSENER CAPABILITY TO DEFEND ITSELF. THEY COMPARED THE BENEFITS PRESENTLY ACCRUING TO THAILAND, A CLOSE AND LONG-TIME ALLY, UNFAVORABLY WITH THOSE EGYPT AND YUGOSLAVIA ARE CURRENTLY

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RECEIVING. ONE OFFICIAL WENT SO FAR AS TO SUGGEST THAT, IF THE US HAS NOTHING MUCH TO OFFER THAILAND, IT SHOULD CONSIDER PACKING UP AND GOING HOME.

6. COMMENT: DOCUMENTING THIS CONVERSATION BY CABLE IS NOT INTENDED TO SIGNIFY THAT THE RTG MAY SOON ASK FOR A PRECIPITIOUS US MILITARY WITHDRAWAL. TOP RTG OFFICIALS WHO STILL MAKE THE KEY DECISIONS HAVE REPEATEDLY ASSURED US THAT THEY DO NOT WANT AN ABRUPT WITHDRAWAL OF US MILITARY FORCES, BUT WANT OUR REDUCTIONS TO RELATE TO A REDUCED THREAT AND INCREASED STABILITY IN THE AREA. TWO THINGS, HOWEVER, SHOULD BE NOTED WITH GREAT CARE: MANY OF THE REACTIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS MEETING WITH DR. TRAGER IMPLY STRONGLY RESENTMENTS WHICH STEM FROM THAILAND'S INCREASED SENSE OF BEING CUT LOOSE WITHOUT

ADEQUATE GUARANTEES FOR THE FUTURE; SENIOR RTG OFFICIALS MAY YET PROVE EQUALLY PRONE TO THESE RESENTMENTS. SECONDLY, THE YOUNGER OFFICIALS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS MEETING ARE RECEIVING GREATER RESPONSIBILITY AND ACHIEVING INCREASING INFLUENCE ON TOP RTG DECISION-MAKERS. WE MUST THEREFORE BEAR IN MIND THAT THAI ATTITUDES AND PERSPECTIVES TOWARD THE U.S. MAY BE CHANGING IN THE QUARTERS THAT COUNT.

7. THIS PROCESS OF CHANGE IS STILL NASCIENT ENOUGH THAT WE CAN STILL SHAPE AND INFLUENCE IT THROUGH OUR POLICIES AND ACTIONS. THE THANOM-PRAPHAT GOVERNMENT DID LITTLE TO PERSUADE OFFICIALS OF THE RTT AND THAI SOCIETY IN GENERAL OUR CONTINUED MILITARY PRESENCE AND ACTIVITIES HERE REDOUND TO THAILAND'S BENEFIT. WE ARE WORKING TO CONVINCE THAI OF THE VALUE OF THE THAI-US RELATIONSHIP, BUT DO FIND OUR TASK COMPLICATED BY DECLINING ASSISTANCE AND AN INABILITY TO DISCUSS DEFINITELY US PLANS AND POLICIES WHICH MIGHT INVOLVE THAILAND IN THE FUTURE. OUR RELATIONS WITH THE THAI COULD CONTINUE TO BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE IF WE WISH TO USE THAILAND PROPORTIONATELY MORE FOR MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE PURPOSES RELATED TO THE INDIAN OCEAN OR OTHER AREAS. WE CANNOT EXPECT THAT THAILAND WILL GIVE US THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT THAT ACTIVITIES WHICH ARE OBVIOUSLY IN THE US NATIONAL INTEREST ARE LIKEWISE AUTOMATICALLY IN THE INTEREST OF THE RTG. IF WE DO NOT TAKE GREATER INITIATIVE TO
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MEET THAILAND'S EXPRESSED DESIRES FOR AID AND TRADE OPPORTUNITIES TO COOPERATE AND SHARE INFORMATION OF COMMON VALUE AND TO RELATE OUR OTHER ACTIVITIES TO THAI SECURITY INTERESTS, WE MAY FIND OURSELVES FORCED TO DISCARD THE THAI OPTION IN OUR FUTURE STRATEGIC CALCULATIONS.
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